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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 005417

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: JORDANIAN FUGITIVE ARRESTED IN SYRIA

Classified By: CDA David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) Post security contacts on July 5 confirmed press reports that Syrian authorities arrested a Jordanian fugitive, Sharif Ayid al-Smadi, wanted in Jordan on charges of murder, armed robbery, and theft. Jordan's state prosecutor on June 23 had charged Smadi and two of his brothers (Mohammed, also on the run and believed to be in Syria, and Thaer, currently in Jordanian custody) with plotting to commit criminal acts against citizens and their financial assets and possessing an illegal weapon (machinegun) with illicit intent. Syrian forces captured Smadi following a shootout as they raided their safehouse, according to Jordanian authorities. An unknown number of suspects were killed in the shootout and at least one other person was arrested. Press reports indicate that the Syrians also arrested Mohammad al-Smadi's wife. Terrorist links have not been ruled out, but one security official told us that reports that the men have links to al-Qa'ida are untrue.

2. (U) According to Jordanian authorities, the Smadi brothers have committed several crimes along with other family members (dubbed the Udwan Mills Gang because they were captured in a police raid in the Udwan Mills village near the town of Sukhneh northeast of Amman). Mohammed and Sharif have been on the run since escaping from authorities while being escorted to court from their prison in June 2004. Jordanian security officials are in "constant contact" with their Syrian counterparts about the matter and will release more information to the public as it becomes available, Head of the Public Security Department Media Office, Major Bashir Daaja, told reporters.

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HALE